

MATERNITY AND NURSING BRAS

The breasts are made up of fatty and connective tissue and glands. During pregnancy, the breasts become heavier and more sensitive due to increased fluid and mammary gland growth — a process that can put undue strain on the neck and shoulders. A proper-fitting bra, however, can make all the difference. Already large-breasted women are most likely to feel the tension and are most likely to benefit from a maternity or nursing bra. Small-breasted women may find a nursing tank or sports bra is comfortable and offers enough support. If you are interested in wearing a maternity or nursing bra, however, a professional fitting is recommended.

Many women use the terms interchangeably, but a maternity bra is very different from a nursing bra. A **maternity bra** is worn before and after pregnancy by mothers who are not planning to breastfeed. Maternity bras, which are designed to provide extra breast support, offer stretchy cups that can expand with growing breasts. Maternity bras are designed to fit comfortably on the tightest hook early in the pregnancy and adjust to the loosest hook by the third trimester.

A **nursing bra** is worn after baby arrives by mothers who have decided to breastfeed. The cups clip and drop down to expose the breasts for nursing. Nursing bras are usually seamless and are designed to provide a natural shape and much-needed support.

MATERNITY BRA FEATURES

Look for the following when choosing a maternity bra:

- ▶ Wide side bands and shoulder straps to support growing breast tissue
- ▶ Cushioned, nonstretch shoulder straps
- ▶ Limited decorative details (lace, etc.) that do not scratch or irritate the skin
- ▶ Three or more back closures for fit flexibility during and after pregnancy
- ▶ Band that lies under the breast and on the rib cage; no creeping
- ▶ Cups that are large enough to give adequate coverage and depth
- ▶ Cotton or wicking microfiber if you will be pregnant during the summer or get hot easily

In addition to the above features, an important tip for moms looking for a nursing bra is to find one that has convenient, easy access to the breast. Cup clips that can be opened with one hand are ideal.

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SOFT CUP VS. UNDERWIRE

Soft-cup bras are usually more comfortable when the breasts are at their fullest — during the last months of pregnancy and the first month of breastfeeding. If you prefer an underwire bra, however, it is imperative that the wire fits well under and behind the breast tissue. Pressure on the breast tissue can result in a plugged duct and ultimately mastitis or breast infection. Do not wear an underwire bra while sleeping.

WHEN TO BUY AND HOW MANY

The time to buy a maternity or nursing bra is when the breasts begin to swell and existing bras no longer fit, usually any time in the fourth month or later. It is not unusual, however, to need a new, larger bra toward the end of the pregnancy.

The breasts usually stabilize in the seventh to eighth month of pregnancy, so wait until then to buy a nursing bra. Buy one cup size larger than your measurement at eight months since this is the projection of how much the breasts will grow once milk comes in after the birth. If you prefer, however, you can wait until after baby is born to purchase a nursing bra. The ideal time to determine your needed cup size is two to three days after delivery.

Three maternity/nursing bras are recommend—one to wear, one to launder and a spare.